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# ConnectME Authority Meeting Notes - June 28, 2007

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**ConnectME Authority**  
Minutes of June 28, 2007  
Transportation Committee, Room 126, Augusta, Maine

**Members in Attendance:** Dan Breton, Jean Wilson, Kurt Adams, Dick Thompson

**Utilities & Energy Committee:** Rep. Seth Berry and Rep. Stacey Fitts

**Staff:** Michael Mahoney, Amy Spelke, and Kelly Arata

**Commissioner Copps Overview**

Commissioner Copps discussed his views about broadband in general. Every American should have access to broadband as it is integrally related to economic development. There is concern with the digital gap between urban and rural. Broadband represents the roads and bridges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A Newsweek article had stated that broadband in the United States was lower than in Estonia. We are ranked 24<sup>th</sup>. The Federal Communications Commission has not been active in this area. They are lacking facts. He has been pushing the Commission to do a better job. He applauded the municipal groups that are pulling together to get service.

**Rep. Stacey Fitts Briefing**

Rep. Stacey Fitts is a member of the Utilities and Energy Committee. It was his opinion that Maine is kind of outside the nation. Maine is a rural state. Investments don't always pay off. The take rates are low. People weren't buying it. He thinks it has to do with the price. The Governor's initial announcement was that he wanted Maine to move forward on broadband and cell phone service, but is more focused on broadband right now. The enacting legislation set forth the criteria for unserved and underserved areas. It also allowed the Authority to collect data to determine obstacles. We need to track investments in regards to what is happening. There is concern between the regulated and unregulated areas. He believes that this initiative will be successful. A funding mechanism has been created. There was legislation relating to accessing of federal money for this build out. He looks forward to the report back to the Legislature on this issue.

**ConnectME Authority – Overview**

Dan Breton gave an overview from the ConnectME Authority's creation to the adoption of the rules. This is a public-private partnership. The Advisory Council will help make this work. Applications will help gather data. He suspects that there will be solutions that are hybrids. The Authority needs to determine barriers. They are moving as fast as they can. A website was created where everything is being posted.

### **Advisory Council – Briefing**

Reggie Palmer, an Advisory Council member, stated that the Authority has given them some duties dealing with the pre-application and application process. During the prior task force process, Amy Spelke and Reggie Palmer worked on getting details on where there were pockets. He also could not overemphasize the importance of the Universal Service Fund (USF).

Commissioner Copps stated that it is a valuable proposition. Some people don't think that you get much for the money. E-Rate is important. He likes public-private partnerships and has done this on the federal level. It is good to reach out to other states, such as Kentucky. He doesn't see legislation at the federal level moving very quickly.

### **Discussion**

Dan Breton stated that the Authority is a clearinghouse for municipal information, such as Hermon.net. We need to learn from that. People seem to be moving in the same direction. He does not want to impede investment.

Commissioner Copps stated that a goal that everyone agrees on is needed.

Kurt Adams stated that one way that the regulatory commission has fallen down is with employers. This is a data collection problem. Bandwidth is not shared openly from employers. We have to compete for state telecommunications dollars. The Authority has created incentives. A level playing field is the Authority's responsibility and a federal responsibility.

John Markowski stated that Edgecomb has formed a committee to bring broadband to their town. Businesses have moved out of town because they could not get service. Janet Blevins stated that a lot of services go through Edgecomb to Boothbay Harbor. Cable companies are not connecting either. There are many small home businesses in Edgecomb.

Linda Lord from the Maine State Library stated that the federal E-rate is important. This allows people to use libraries.

Lance Bell from Time Warner stated that they have talked to the residents of Edgecomb. Time Warner has been active in regards to line extensions but may not cover some areas. There are five underway in the franchise agreement.

Ben Sanborn from the Telephone Association of Maine (TAM) stated that the rules are designed to maximize private investment. Requests for broadband service will go out to incumbent companies first to have them re-evaluate putting in access.

Commissioner Copps briefly discussed broadband policy, public safety and the transition to digital.

A “MainelyWired” representative stated that they have no public funding. If a provider commits for a whole town, then it should get preference. Dan Breton stated that the Authority will not fund two providers in one town.

An “ExpressAmerica” representative stated that he requested that the Edgecomb people come to this meeting. His concern that a big company will come in at half the price and scoop his investment away. Rep. Fitts stated that the Authority needs to find areas where there is direct competition. He does not want to squelch private investment. Dan Breton stated that there are built-in limitations because the Authority only has so much money.

Wayne Jortner from the Office of Public Advocate (and proposed Advisory Council member) stated that it is important to get information to willing partners.

Fletcher Kittredge from Great Works Internet (and Advisory Council member) stated that there is a lot of suspicion between providers but this is a good process. It would be good if wireless could take the pressure off.

Reggie Palmer from TAM (and Advisory Council member) wondered how the Authority will deal with the unserved and the overlap issue on the wireless side. Dan Breton stated that the Authority did wrestle with this issue. Fletcher Kittredge stated that he has confidence that wireless can do that. Dan Breton believes that it would be good to have several providers who would want to serve an area.

John Makowsky stated that Edgecomb wants this done in weeks, not months. Dan Breton stated that the law relating to the rules was just enacted. The Authority now just needs to get the funds to move forward. Fletcher Kittredge hopes to get the application approved by next week so that applicants can have a report back date of August 15, 2007. Rep. Fitts stated that the tax benefit is in place now. We all want things to happen quicker.

### **Next Meeting**

The Authority has scheduled its next meeting for July 5, 2007.